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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIFR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT REINS IN ANTI-FRENCH PROTESTS ON
BEIJING CAMPUSES, ANGER AT WESTERN "BIAS" REMAINS

REF: A. BEIJING 1570

[1](#)B. BEIJING 1454

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Chinese authorities this past week have moved to curtail anti-French and anti-Western demonstrations in China. Official propaganda has tried to steer the public toward more "rational" displays of patriotism, with security and Party officials bluntly telling university students in Beijing to halt all protests. (Note: One contact told us the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) decided on April 18 to take steps to rein in the current wave of nationalism that central authorities had, in part, been fanning. The next day, official media began running stories calling for "rational" patriotism.) Students appear to be taking heed, though some have told us they remain frustrated and angry at the West's "unfair" criticism of China's Tibet policies and the humiliation of Olympic torch runners. "Patriotism" is running high, our contacts say, but "destabilizing nationalism" remains in check. End Summary.

Anti-French Protests

[1](#)2. (SBU) Prior to this past week, anti-Western, especially anti-French, sentiment had been on the rise in many parts of China, as manifested by fiery on-line rhetoric among China's netizens and demonstrations in a number of Chinese cities. For example, demonstrators gathered outside locations of the French supermarket giant Carrefour throughout China April 18-20. The protests started in part due to a widely held belief (later denied by the company) that a major Carrefour stockholder has provided financial aid to organizations advocating Tibetan independence. France's "mishandling" of the torch relay and French President Sarkozy's potential "snubbing" of the Olympic opening ceremonies also fueled the demonstrations. While largely peaceful, demonstrations in some cities took a xenophobic and violent turn. In Zhuzhou, Hunan Province, a mob reportedly attacked an American English teacher, whom they apparently mistakenly assumed was French, as he emerged from a Carrefour April 20. Other signs of rising patriotic and anti-French sentiment included a photo circulating on the Internet showing a taxi in Shandong Province with a sign in the back window that reads, "Refuse to carry Frenchmen and dogs." An Internet cartoon widely circulated among Chinese youth via e-mail depicts a character severely beating a would-be Carrefour shopper. On Saturday, April 18, there were small demonstrations in Beijing front of the French Embassy and a nearby French school.

"Patriotism Should Be Rational"

13. (C) As the anti-French protests reached a peak over the weekend of April 19-20, China's propaganda apparatus on April 19 began a campaign to calm public anger. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX this new propaganda phase grew out of a decision made at an April 18 Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) meeting. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, at the meeting, China's leadership decided that the goal of utilizing the Chinese public to "protest against and warn" Western countries had "already succeeded." Therefore, before nationalist sentiment spun off in unwanted directions domestically or led to a dramatic shift in Western countries' attitudes toward China, the Center should move to curb growing patriotic fervor. Prior to April 18, central authorities had been deliberately fanning the flames of nationalism, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, claiming that acquaintances in the Party Propaganda Department had been posing as bloggers or online commentators, purposefully posting rhetoric designed to fuel anti-Western feelings, assisted by the official media's exceptionally hard-line propaganda. Party Propaganda Department head Liu Yunshan was reportedly directly behind these policies. Now, however, the Center has decided to "stop playing with fire," XXXXXXXXXXXX stated.

14. (C) Following the April 19 Xinhua News Agency piece calling for more "rational" expressions of nationalism, other media pieces appeared emphasizing the same line while also attempting to directly dampen anti-French sentiment. In a story that ran in Chinese papers April 21, the Xinhua News Agency reported denials by Carrefour's CEO that the company supported Tibetan independence. The cover of the April 22 edition of Beijing News (Xinjing Bao) carried a photo of a dormitory building at the Beijing Institute of Technology with numerous Chinese flags flying outside the windows. The

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caption quotes school officials as saying that displaying the flag is a "rational" (li xing) and "normal" expression of the student's patriotism. On April 23, newspapers printed another Xinhua story, this one quoting a Ministry of Commerce official praising Carrefour for providing 40,000 jobs in China, selling mostly Chinese products and supporting the Beijing Games.

Students Told To Stop Anti-French Protests

15. (C) This pro-Carrefour propaganda campaign, according to our contacts, corresponded with more direct efforts by security and Communist Party officials to stop university students in Beijing from participating in further demonstrations. XXXXXXXXXXXX, told PolOff that two Ministry of State Security agents approached him XXXXXXXXXXXX to demand that the Institute cancel a public discussion on nationalism scheduled to take place the following day. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, security forces had also "spoken with" at least XXXXXXXXXXXX activists to warn them against any further anti-Western activities. At XXXXXXXXXXXX told PolOff XXXXXXXXXXXX that the university's Communist Party committee had likewise issued instructions to students to cease all demonstrations. XXXXXXXXXXXX, added that all class-level Party representatives were enlisted to ensure the message reached the entire student body.

"West Blindly Sympathetic Toward Dalai Lama"

16. (C) While protests have subsided, students we spoke with still expressed frustration at the West's reaction to events in Tibet. XXXXXXXXXXXX. The students all said they were angered by "biased" Western media reports of the March 14 Lhasa riots, singling CNN out for special criticism. XXXXXXXXXXXX told PolOff that she sensed in Western media reporting a reflexive sympathy for Tibetans and a deliberate downplaying of the violence ethnic Tibetan

rioters in Lhasa inflicted on innocent Han Chinese. France had become the focus of nationalist anger, according to XXXXXXXXXXXX because Paris police seemed to favour the pro-Tibet protestors and allowed them to attack the torch. While many Chinese are angry with the United States for supporting the Dalai Lama, they said, just as many appreciate President Bush's rejection of an Olympic boycott.

17. (C) While all the students acknowledged problems in Tibet, especially the difficulty in ensuring that more Tibetans benefit from China's economic growth, they accused the West of ignoring the "real progress" China has made. While none of the students has participated in the anti-French protests, all said the unrest in Tibet and the disruptions of the Olympic torch relay had made them feel more patriotic. XXXXXXXXXXXX added that her undergraduate classmates who are currently studying abroad have had the strongest reaction and many have added patriotic slogans to their instant messaging IDs. XXXXXXXXXXXX and her classmates, however, cautioned against exaggerating the long-term impact of the anti-French/ anti-West protests. While emotions are still running high XXXXXXXXXXXX said, "all of this will be forgotten if the Games go well."

Singapore Media "Most Reliable"

18. (C) While focusing most of their ire on Western media and governments, the students also had harsh reviews of the Chinese leadership. XXXXXXXXXXXX criticized the Chinese Government's rhetoric on Tibet as "overly shrill" and "ineffective" in swaying international opinion. XXXXXXXXXXXX said China's official press provided inadequate coverage of the Lhasa riots and did not provide enough information to counter the "biased" Western media reports. XXXXXXXXXXXX and other students said that, in addition to Beijing University's internal Internet bulletin board, they rely most heavily on Singapore's Lianhe Zaobao newspaper for information on Tibet and the torch relay. Singapore's media "understands" China better than Western papers, they said, yet is not subject to Chinese Government censorship. The same could not be said of Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television, they told PolOff. Though widely available on Beijing University's campus, Phoenix is "too close to the Chinese Government" to be of much use.

"We Saved the Tibetans"

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19. (C) Two twenty-something professionals, both of whom were recently accepted into Duke University's MBA program, echoed the frustrations of the Beijing University students in a conversation with PolOff April 23. XXXXXXXXXXXX, complained about the "bias" of CNN. Westerners do not understand the "true story" about Tibet, Li asserted, adding that China "saved Tibetans from slavery." XXXXXXXXXXXX said his generation is more "pro-establishment" than young people in most other parts of the world. Members of China's "80s generation," XXXXXXXXXXXX added, have benefited greatly from China's reforms and, though young, still remember the relative poverty of the late 1980s and early 1990s. While this does not mean all Chinese youth support the Communist Party, XXXXXXXXXXXX explained, pride in China's recent accomplishments does make them rally around the flag when they see China criticized abroad. XXXXXXXXXXXX, however, said China's Government has moved quickly to limit the anti-French protests because it wants to avoid a repeat of 2005, when anti-Japanese protests "got out of control."

110. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX said young Chinese tend to be suspicious, even dismissive, of government propaganda except when it comes to issues of national unity. A lifetime of political indoctrination has conditioned Chinese of all ages to react emotionally to perceived separatists threats, which makes China

appear irrational and thin-skinned to the outside world. XXXXXXXXXXXX, however, noted positive differences between recent anti-French demonstrations and the 2005 anti-Japanese protests. First, he said, the number of actual demonstrators outside Carrefour branches was very small. In most cases, spectators greatly outnumbered the protestors. Second, in contrast to previous nationalist incidents, there was a much wider debate on the Internet about the appropriateness of anti-Western protests. XXXXXXXXXXXX said he was struck by the large number of Chinese netizens who voiced opposition to the Carrefour boycott. He said this is a "positive sign" that may indicate Chinese attitudes towards the outside world are growing more mature.

Comment

¶11. (C) Patriotic sentiment, especially among students, appears sincere and on the rise, even though the Government has clearly played a role in fanning such feelings. Chinese Government efforts over the past week to put a lid on overt nationalist demonstrations has so far been effective. The message now emphasized by China's propaganda organs is that holding a successful Olympics, not rash protests, is the best answer to Western criticism. Our contacts quoted above, all of whom are well-educated and internationally oriented, agree with this sentiment. Nevertheless, they do appear to have been genuinely stung by what they see as a sudden and "unfair" rejection of China by many Western countries.
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